

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

PRINCE WILLIAM FOREST PARK
VIRGINIA



Finding of No Significant Impact Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine Trail Restoration Project

Recommended by:

Robert S. Hunt
Superintendent, Prince William Forest Park

3/9/04
Date

Approved by:

Henry R. Cantelero
Regional Director, National Capital Region

3/22/04
Date

I. Introduction

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the National Park Service (NPS) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) which was finalized in 1998, with a FONSI issued in 1999. The EA analyzed the potential impacts of a project to restore a section of the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine Trail in Prince William Forest Park (PRWI). The EA found Alternative E to be the preferred alternative primarily for economic reasons, and the spur trail was installed in 1999. After five years of public comments addressing the desire to re-establish a through trail near the Pyrite Mine and improved steel bridge construction techniques, park management has found implementation of Alternative C to be in the best interest of the resources and visitors.

Alternative C encourages visitor exploration of the Pyrite Mine area from a distance and concentrates visitor use away from the fragile niche ecosystems established by the reclamation of the mine. This will be accomplished by constructing 500 feet of trail which includes 200 ft. of boardwalk, and installation of a 60 foot by 4 foot steel foot bridge over Quantico Creek. This additional trail will be constructed on top of tailings pile B. Establishment of this trail will minimize the current condition of multiple social trails along the west bank of Quantico creek within the riparian zone which includes a myriad of cultural resources associated with the Pyrite Mine National Register Site. The purpose of this document is to affirm which course of action the NPS intends to follow and to record a finding of no significant impact (FONSI).

II. Alternatives

The objectives of this project are:

1. Reopen the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine Trail along its entire length
2. Minimize erosion and potential water quality effects
3. Develop a more sustainable section of trail
4. Ensure the safety of park staff and visitors

The objectives were developed based upon the following issues which are fully described in the Final Environmental Assessment:

- the reduction in the quality of the visitor use experience due to the trail closure
- the impact to water quality as a result of stream bank and trail erosion
- the sustainability of this section of the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine Trail
- the protection of visitor and employee safety

To achieve these goals, alternatives for the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine Trail Reestablishment project were developed within the defined project objectives, and were based upon National Park Service and Prince William Forest Park guidelines and management objectives.

A. Preferred Alternative

Alternative C - Restore Hiking Trail Pile B Area With Steel Bridge

Under this alternative a modular steel foot bridge would be installed and a new through trail established connecting the Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine Trail to the North Valley Trail. This alternative effectively creates a through route including the previously implemented Alternative E. This would be the most sustainable alternative as it would eliminate the need to continually repair and rehabilitate damaged resources within the fragile riparian post-reclamation landscape.

B. Other Alternatives Considered

Alternative A – No Action

Under this alternative, the area would remain in its current condition. Individuals hiking the Cabin Branch Mine Trail will continue to double back in order to access the overview area at the end of the spur trail.

Alternative B – Restore Hiking Trail Pile B Area with Wooden Bridge

Under this alternative, a wooden bridge would be constructed rather than a steel bridge. This would re-establish a through trail as described in Alternative C. A wood bridge is considered a less than ideal alternative from a sustainability perspective.

Alternative D – Restore Hiking Trail Pile A Area (No Bridge)

This alternative would entail restoring the trail to the tailings pile A area. This would impact the fragile riparian post-reclamation landscape. This will degrade an area which has just recently begun to stabilize from application of reclamation techniques.

Alternative E – Restore Trail/Boardwalk and Viewing Platform Only (Spur Trail)

This alternative has been implemented. The boardwalk and viewing platforms have been installed. Visitor use is minimal; connecting the spur to a through trail would improve the visitor experience by providing the opportunity to experience the mining setting from a improved vantage point along the east bank of Quantico Creek.

III. Environmental Impacts

The potential environmental impacts associated with the alternatives that were considered are analyzed in Section V of the EA. The preferred alternative will help protect visitor and employee safety, improve the visitor experience, minimize impacts to water quality, and increase the sustainability of this section of trail. The new trail and bridge will re-establish a through route which has been missed by visitors. The route will have the least possible effect on the environment with its designated routing on top of tailings pile B. After careful evaluation of the potential impacts of the project, the National Park Service has determined that this action will not result in impairment.

IV. Public Participation

The Cabin Branch Pyrite Mine Trail Restoration Project Draft Environmental Assessment was released for public review on June 8, 1998. A press release was sent to local media and was posted on the park's website. The document was sent to individuals on the park's mailing list, and to federal, state and local agencies for comment. In addition, it was made available at the visitor center, and by request. The public review period ended on July 8, 1998, and six comments were received from a range of concerned advocates. All comments were addressed in the Final Environmental Assessment.

V. Impairment of Park Resources and Values

Based upon the analysis documented in the EA, and the professional judgment of the decision-maker in accordance with the *NPS Management Policies, 2001*, it is the decision of the National Park Service to implement Alternative C to augment Alternative E. The preferred action includes constructing 500 feet of trail which includes 200 ft. of boardwalk, and installation of a 60 foot by 4 foot steel foot bridge over Quantico Creek. This alternative will satisfy the established project objectives with minimal impact to the park's resources.

This project does not constitute impairment to park resources and values, nor is it a violation of the NPS Organic Act. The selected alternative does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, as described in section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The project is not committing the National Park Service to specific future actions, which would constitute a significant or controversial impact. The impact of this proposal is not cumulative in nature, either in itself or in conjunction with other Federal or non-Federal projects.

VI. Finding of No Significant Impact

Pursuant to Section 102 (2)(C) of NEPA, the Guidelines of the Council on Environmental Quality, and the *National Park Service Management Policies 2001*, this proposal does not require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement. Therefore, a Finding of No Significant Impact is warranted to implement the actions described in Alternative C.